

ADS 203 – Assessing and Learning

203.1 OVERVIEW

Effective Date: 01/31/2003

USAID as an agency plans and implements activities, programs, and projects that are expected to make a difference in specific countries and regions around the world. ADS chapters [200](#), [201](#), and [202](#) provide the guidance on how to plan and implement USAID activities. This ADS chapter 203 provides guidance on how Operating Units should assess whether activities are actually achieving the intended results, how Operating Units should learn from that experience, and how Operating Units should facilitate the sharing of knowledge through the Agency and the development community as a whole.

There is overlap between the primary themes of this chapter: assessing, learning, and sharing. An evaluation, for example, can be used to assess “whether” an activity achieved its purpose, to establish lessons *learned* that may be useful elsewhere, and the report itself is important to *share* the findings with others. The overlap between the tools of this chapter is represented in the following matrix.

Tool	Assessing	Learning	Sharing
Performance Management Plans	X	X	X
Data Quality Assessments	X		
Portfolio Reviews	X	X	
Operating Unit Annual Reports		X	X
Evaluations	X	X	X
Intensive Program Reviews	X	X	X
Close out Reports	X	X	X
Document Submission to DEC			X

The key concept throughout this chapter is that Operating Units can only assess the impact of an activity if they have previously defined what the activity is intended to accomplish, how the various inputs should work together to achieve the desired results, and how these results will be measured. In order to successfully implement performance management and learn from experience, Operating Units should establish ways to collect performance information, analyze it for trends, and review it for meaning.

203.2 PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITIES

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a. **Operating Units** support SO Teams in assessing and learning, manage the Portfolio Review process, and are responsible for preparing and submitting Annual Reports to their Bureau.

b. Strategic Objective (SO) Teams are typically responsible for all aspects of assessing and learning for the results and activities justified and funded through their SO. SO Teams establish, use, and critically assess performance management tools to collect and analyze data on performance. SO Teams ensure that all activities contribute to achievement of results agreed upon in approved Strategic Plans, and use the information to improve on-going activities or help design new ones. Finally, SO Teams use performance information and assessments for the Annual Report and justification of future year budgets.

c. Regional Bureaus may have a dual role. First, when overseeing Operating Units in the field, Regional Bureaus ensure that Operating Units under their purview have the capacity and support needed to establish appropriate performance management systems and are able to meet Annual Report reporting requirements. Bureaus conduct annual reviews of SO level performance and periodic intensive reviews of overall program performance. Regional Bureaus use performance information to determine budget allocations and summarize progress for Agency-level reporting. Regional Bureaus are responsible for ensuring cooperation in achieving shared objectives. Second, when Regional Bureaus manage regional programs, they fall into the discussion above for Operating Units and SO Teams.

d. Pillar Bureaus may have a dual role. When Pillar Bureaus manage centrally funded programs, they fall under the discussion above for Operating Units and SO Teams. Pillar Bureau Operating Units also lead “Sector Councils,” which contribute significantly to annual assessments of progress across all SOs in a given goal area, for purposes of internal management decision-making including budgeting, performance management, and external reporting.

e. The Bureau for Policy and Program Coordination (PPC) is the focal point for knowledge management within the Agency. PPC coordinates assessing and learning efforts at the Agency level and provides guidance on assessing and learning standards, tools, and procedures. PPC maintains websites that make Annual Reports, evaluative reports and other documentation on Agency programs available for Agency-wide use. PPC is responsible for reviewing the quality of each Bureau's performance information and providing feedback annually to the respective Assistant Administrators. PPC prepares an annual agenda of and conducts Agency-wide evaluations on the effectiveness of programs and operations. PPC prepares reports to the Office of Management and Budget and to Congress on Agency performance and resource allocation decisions. PPC administers the Agency's “strategic budgeting” process and ensures that budget requests and budget allocation decisions at the Agency level take into account relevant and appropriate performance information.

f. The Office of General Counsel (GC) provides legal interpretation of legislation and other federal guidance pertaining to performance management and reporting.

